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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides some guidelines for preparing African American students for college. Parents' experiences with higher education are a key to shaping their expectations for their children, and the lack of direct parental experience can be a handicap for students who will be the first generation of their families to attend college. Educators must take a role in helping these students get ready for higher education. Academic preparation requires the completion of a rigorous curriculum with satisfactory evidence of achievement such as scores on college entrance examinations. Adequate preparation cannot occur overnight or in a vacuum. Students who have not had the advantages of adequate academic preparation may be eligible for special admissions programs. Knowing how to apply and succeed in these programs is important, but the real key to college admission is better preparation for African American students. Parental expectations and the attitudes of student peer play an important role in the student's preparation. The African American community needs to embrace a new vision regarding students attending and graduating from college. Helping African American students prepare for college is a complex and multidimensional challenge. Studying students who succeed in college will provide insight into ways to help others succeed. (Contains nine references.) (SLD)

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by
O. Gilbert Brown

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Introduction

Many Americans have used the attainment of a bachelor's degree as a first step on the social escalator to improve their station in life. For various reasons, white students, particularly those from European backgrounds, have been more successful than African-American students in attaining baccalaureate degrees from predominately white institutions of higher education. Often this lack of success by African-American students is erroneously blamed on historically racial factors, a prominent fallacy being that African-American students did not attend "white universities" prior to the 1960s. In fact, both before and after the turning-point year of 1968, small cohorts of African-Americans could be found at most predominately white universities (Brown 1992).

However, the small size of those cohorts of African-American students from economic and educational backgrounds similar to their white counterparts is telling. The Great Society years, therefore, brought about significant changes. A fundamental tenet of the Great Society philosophy was that social mobility for African Americans could be achieved by attainment of

the baccalaureate degree. Thus a variety of forces, from civil rights demonstrations to the enactment of the Higher Education Act of 1965, set in motion by about 1968 a powerful drive among predominately white universities to recruit African-American students (Brown 1992). Many universities continue to actively recruit African-American students today.

However, recruitment is only a small part of the picture. A more important factor is preparation. And in that area, schools in general have fallen short. Many African-American students still are not well-prepared to achieve success in college. Levine and Nidiffer comment:

> In 1940, a black person age twenty-five to twenty-nine had a 25% likelihood of a comparably aged white person of completing four years of college. By 1989, the percentage had increased to 52%. After a brief decline, the chances of a black student earning a college degree inched up to almost 54% of that of whites as of 1993, the last year data were available. Of the more than 1.5 million bachelor's and associate degrees earned by Americans in 1992, slightly less than 7% of them were earned by black students, although blacks make up 12% of the US population and 16% of the nation' s twenty-year-olds. (1996, p. 4)

The African-American students' uneven academic preparation for college is a key factor in shaping the disparity between whites and blacks in earning baccalaureate degrees. Experience shows that the truism is indeed accurate: Academically well-prepared and committed students are more likely to succeed than underprepared and marginally committed students (Levine and Nidiffer

1996). And too many African-American students are underprepared and only marginally committed to earning a bachelor's degree.

The purpose of this fastback is to provide some guideposts to better preparing African-American students for college. Many of these guideposts are designed to assist parents, particularly parents whose offspring will become first-generation college students. However, neither parents nor schools alone can be as successful in helping African Americans attain a college degree as the school and home can be by working together.

Many factors influence the future success of African-American high-schoolers when they aim for a college degree. Peer expectations, teachers' and counselors' expectations, and solid academic achievement are very important. But parental expectations are crucial. And educators can help to shape and to inform parents' positive expectations for their children.

Parents' experiences with higher education are a key to shaping their expectations for their children. Direct college or university experience is important; but for children who will be first-generation college students, that direct parental experience will be missing. This lack of direct college experience can be a handicap to the future generation unless educators take a role in helping the non-college-educated parents to play a part in setting realistic, and optimistic, goals for their children's future in higher education.

In working with parents, both those with college experience and those without, educators must realize that African-American parents are no more a monolith than

are their Asian, Hispanic, or white counterparts. African-American parents represent the full range, from uninformed and apathetic to informed and eager. Therefore, it will be necessary for teachers, administrators, and counselors to examine closely each student's situation and family history to determine the kinds of assistance and information that are most likely to be helpful.

Accomplishing this task requires that we discuss some specifics about getting ready for college, such as academic preparation, completing a college preparatory curriculum, curriculum preparation patterns and students' college attendance patterns, parent involvement with schools, academic expectations of the peer group, and unleashing the African-American community's academic expectations.

Academic Preparation

The following four assumptions affect discussion, research, and policy development regarding the academic preparation of African-American students.

- Academic preparation for college is adequate when students have completed a rigorous precollege curriculum consisting of several units beyond the state's minimum graduation requirements in traditional disciplines such as advanced mathematics, English, the sciences, and foreign languages.
- Academic preparation for college is adequate when the student can show evidence of achievement measured in cumulative grade point average (GPA), class rank, and such standardized tests as the ACT or SAT. Students who do well on these indicators in high school typically earn a satisfactory GPA in college, persist (maintain continuous enrollment), and earn a bachelor's degree within four or five years.
- Adequate academic preparation for college does not occur overnight or in a social vacuum. It is a result of the direct and indirect influences of mul-

tiple factors, including peer-group norms, teachers' and counselors' expectations, and parents' aspirations and guidance.

- African-American students are diverse in terms of their family histories, parental expectations, school experience, personal aspirations, and other factors. They cannot be viewed as a monolithic group with identical, or even similar, academic motivations and goals as a common feature. Their diversity affects their academic experiences in high school and college. Thus no single approach can be used to address all the needs of these students.

The common thread among these assumptions is that academic preparation requires deliberation. Solid academic preparation is a long-term process that requires dedication on the part of educators, parents, and the students themselves.

Graduation requirements differ from state to state and from district to district. However, high school curricula can be divided into roughly two types. One curriculum is for students who intend to go to college; the other is for students who do not. In the latter case, students are likely to take only the minimum required classes — the "basics" or core curriculum in English, math, and science — and to fill out their high school schedules with personally interesting electives and vocational classes that may help them to find employment directly after high school graduation.

For the college-bound, the core curriculum is both expanded and extended. Beyond basic, required English,

for example, the college-bound student will be expected to take both more English classes and harder English classes. In addition to the core curriculum required for a high school diploma, certain other classes may be required for college admission, such as one or two years of foreign language. Other classes, while not specifically required for admission to college, may be expected, such as physics or calculus, because they are indicative of a capacity for success in college studies. Schools individually develop their college-prep curricula, but there are broad similarities among the curricula across the United States.

The college-prep curriculum may be thought to include "gatekeeper" classes. Property owners use gates to restrict the entry and exit of individuals or to regulate the movement of people in different situations. Likewise, institutions of higher education use students' completion or lack of completion of the college-prep curriculum as a gate. Students who pass the gatekeeper classes will be allowed unrestricted entry. Students who are deficient in some classes may be allowed to enroll in college subject to some restrictions, such as provisional acceptance pending a successful first semester or first year. Or deficient students may be required to complete certain remedial classes, usually without credit, before being formally admitted to college.

Several studies have shown that students who complete the gatekeeper classes in English, laboratory sciences, foreign languages, and mathematics are likely to attend college, have high academic achievement, and earn a bachelor's degree within four or five years. In

particular, students who complete advanced math classes are twice as likely to attend and graduate from college as those who do not take such classes (Pelavin and Kane 1990).

African-American (and Hispanic) students are underrepresented in high school college-prep programs. Pelavin and Kane report that white students are more likely than black and Hispanic students to complete key gatekeeper courses, particularly Geometry I and II. They show that 83% of white students and 80% of black students completing one or more years of geometry attend college within four years of high school graduation. According to their study, "Eighty percent of black students who take geometry attend some college within four years of their scheduled graduation, while only 39% of black students who do not take geometry pursue higher education within four years of high school" (1990, p. 48).

Obviously, one key to ensuring that African-American students have the opportunity to enter college and persist is to help more students take on the challenges of a college-prep program. Most schools and districts have established college-prep standards, but so have some states. Indiana, for example, has established a college-prep curriculum called the Core 40, which exceeds the minimum high school graduation requirements. By taking the Core 40, successful students are assured of college admission, which is the first hurdle they must leap in order to pursue a bachelor's degree.

College Admission

Students who complete Indiana's Core 40 or a similar program in other states are considered academically prepared and admissible through a college's regular admission program. Students with less rigorous preparation may be eligible for admission through a special admissions program.

Regular Admission

Regular admission means that the "student is admitted without limiting conditions. Institutions deem students who gain regular admission adequately prepared for college-level course work and may enroll immediately in courses leading toward the degree of their choice" (Indiana Department of Education 1994, p. 8).

Colleges make admission decisions based on a combination of traditional factors in addition to college-prep classes, including overall GPA; SAT, ACT, or other test scores; and class rank. Selective public and private institutions of higher education also expect that applicants for admission will have completed a rigorous college-prep curriculum. While this expectation is the common denominator among groups of students, white students

from middle- to upper-class backgrounds constitute the largest segment of these applicants in the traditional college age-range (17 to 24 years old). Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans are underrepresented in comparison to their respective representation in the general population.

Such underrepresentation has led most colleges and universities to adjust their admissions standards and to institute special admissions programs in order to enroll more minority students.

Special Admission

Because they do not meet standard admission criteria for most colleges, underprepared students can choose from only a limited number of institutions when considering which college to attend. Those institutions that offer a special admission program are among that number.

For most colleges and universities, a special admission program offers a way to bring minority students onto their campuses and, in particular, to increase the presence of African-American students who will likely be first-generation college graduates (Brown 1992). Many, though by no means all, African-American students pursuing baccalaureate degrees at predominately white colleges and universities have been admitted through special admission programs.

Students admitted to a college or university through a special admission program usually come from low-income families. They may be any race, but African Americans make up the majority in most such programs. Special admission programs also consider students on

the basis of a combination of factors in addition to income and academic preparation. These qualitative indicators include leadership ability, demonstrated ability to overcome obstacles, and letters of reference (Sedlacek 1987).

Many special admission programs are based on two (often erroneous) assumptions: first, that the students' precollege education was unsatisfactory or insufficient and, second, that program participants can assimilate in one intensive summer session the academic skills and values that regular admission students have learned in the course of their high school college-prep program. Clearly, this is a tall order.

The special admission students' preparation for college is, in fact, not a necessary common denominator. Most special admission students, if not all, have financial needs; but some are well-prepared while others are moderately to severely underprepared for college studies (Brown 1992).

Most special admission programs require that participants complete a six- or eight-week intensive precollege program, which is designed to rapidly bring the students' academic skills up to the college level. Most such programs include work in reading and study skills, pre-algebra, and English composition.

As initially conceived, the special admission program model was developed to ensure a higher success rate for underprepared students. However, that goal has not been achieved. In fact, participation in a special admission program does not significantly increase underprepared students' chances of persisting and eventually

obtaining their baccalaureate degree. Special admission programs do provide students with a structured initial college experience and may be useful in other ways for marginally prepared students.

The real answer to widening the pool of African-American students who can — and will — enter college, persist, and earn a bachelor's degree lies in better preparing students during their high school years. That preparation must include not only academic study but also less tangible preparation in the form of appropriate guidance and high expectations.

Parental Expectations

Not long ago I conducted a study in which I asked several African-American students to reflect on how their parents' aspirations and guidance had helped them to prepare for college. I reported this study in a book titled, *Debunking the Myth: Stories of African-American University Students*. Almost universally, the students reported that high parental expectations had played an important part in their decision to go to college and in their commitment to persist and graduate.

One student, Richard, recalled, "I knew that I would go to college. My high school was a college-prep high school that has sent many students to college. Dad is a school teacher in the school system and mom was the valedictorian of her class." Another, Rhonda, reminisced, "My parents strongly believed getting an education was the key to improving their children. . . . My parents told me to focus on being the best that I could be in the classroom" (Brown 1994).

The goals that parents expect their sons and daughters to achieve play a key role in what their children aspire to, persist at, and eventually attain. Students assimilate the values of their families and their com-

munities. When those values include high academic achievement in high school and college, then those students have a better foundation for success.

The academic experiences of the African-American community as a whole are highly diverse, which accounts for the uneven pattern of achievement among African-American students. It is important to recognize this diversity and not to treat all black youth in the same manner. Many African-American families have an established pattern of academic attainment. When grandparents and parents have earned college degrees, it is more likely that succeeding generations also will be college graduates. This is a "legacy effect."

For first-generation college students, an effort must be made to establish a new legacy. The first-generation graduate is struggling against a different legacy of experience, one that may include failed attempts at college by a sibling, parent, or grandparent. Thus it is this group of students on which I want to focus attention. These students cannot turn to their families for firsthand information or positive impressions about the college experience, but they can — or should be able to — rely on their parents and communities to set the goal of a college degree as one that is both desirable and attainable.

While the parents of first-generation college students cannot offer direct knowledge of higher education, they can establish a family value for education and for academic attainment to the highest level possible. They can create an awareness of the link between solid academic preparation in school and the likelihood of college suc-

cess. They can seek out models in the African-American community and elsewhere who demonstrate the potential for academic success that can be emulated by their children. To be sure, African-American history contains many examples of parents using others' direct experiences as models to be followed in creating their own opportunities for success (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1994; Comer 1988).

Educators must be active in fostering parents' attitudes toward academic success throughout their students' schooling — in elementary school, middle school, and particularly in high school. An important part of every educator's job must be helping parents to become partners in setting high expectations for their children and, moreover, helping parents to establish the values, study patterns, and attitudes that will lead their children to success.

Educators can help parents by stressing the importance of 1) establishing consistent study schedules and expectations for their children, 2) becoming involved in school programs and activities, and 3) fostering a commitment to and value for lifelong learning. Each of these points merits some further discussion.

Study Schedules and Expectations

Darien, one of the students in my study, recalled, "Mother told me that my special gifts would take me far in life. She encouraged me to work hard in school, and she established a study structure that allowed me to develop good work habits. Mother established the rule that my homework must be completed before I

went out to play. At first, I didn't like her structure; but it eventually became a habit I continued in middle school and high school, where I scored a 1250 on my SAT and was the salutatorian of my class" (Brown 1994).

In her own way, Darien's mother established her own version of Astin's (1993) involvement theory. Astin defined his involvement theory in this way: "Involvement refers to the amount of time and physical and psychological energy that the student invests in the learning process" (p. 124). Successful students are regularly "invested" in their own intellectual development. They develop habits of study, such as maintaining a regular study schedule, and value those habits as important factors in achieving academic goals. Such habits do not occur spontaneously, however. They usually are established first by concerned parents and later, because they become associated with academic success, come to be valued by the students themselves.

But note also Darien's initial comment: "Mother told me that my special gifts would take me far in life." Expectations are built on positives. Parents who view their children as having high potential are more likely to engender feelings of self-confidence and high self-worth in their children. These are important aspects of setting high expectations. Children must believe in themselves, that they *can* achieve success. And they are more likely to adopt a positive self-assessment when their parents instill confidence in them by believing that they can and will achieve their goals.

Study expectations are set in three stages. First, parents establish an appropriate pattern; they set a study

schedule, establish limits and goals, and emphasize the value of consistent study. Second, over time, the value becomes shared property; both parents and students come to see the study routine as important, something that is given a high priority when other activities threaten to erode or diminish the time for study. Third, students adopt the value of regular study as their own; the internalized value takes on autonomy and becomes a key to success when the students go to college and are away from the daily sphere of parental influence.

Practically speaking, most high school students can establish an appropriate, regular, after-school study time between the end of school (including after-school activities) and about 10 p.m., which is an appropriate bedtime for most adolescents between 14 and 18 years old. This study time should become routine, and other activities should be scheduled around it. Part-time jobs, caring for younger siblings, watching television, and other activities can still take place. But study time must be given priority.

A major difference between academically prepared and underprepared students is the priority that they give to regularly scheduled study. Parents must play a key role in helping students to establish study time as a priority.

Likewise, it is important for parents to help students create and maintain an after-school study environment that is conducive to serious learning. Students' preferences differ on the best study environment, and there is no one best setting. Some students work better alone in their bedroom; others work best if they can spread out

their books and papers on the kitchen table or go to the public library. Students and their parents should discuss appropriate study environments together and mutually agree on times and places for regular after-school study.

Taking the "right" classes, the gatekeeper classes, is only a starting point. Succeeding in those classes in high school and setting the stage for future success in college depends on students developing the firm habit of regular, serious study. Parents and children who work together to create a positive study routine will reap benefits in terms of academic achievement throughout the years of schooling from elementary school through college.

Involvement in School Programs and Activities

In the fall, most schools sponsor an open house to allow parents to learn about their youngsters' academic schedules, day-to-day classroom routines, textbooks, and various school programs. Such open houses are intended to encourage parents and teachers to interact in positive ways. Yet whether parents value participating in formal school functions, such as open houses, will depend on the previous experiences that parents have had with schools, teachers, counselors, and administrators, both as youngsters themselves and as parents. Parents who recall their own school experiences with fondness will likely be better disposed to becoming involved in the school experiences of their children. Likewise, parents who have been positively involved

with schools for their older children are more likely to continue to be involved in the school experiences of their younger children.

When parents recall only school experiences that were negative, then they may be confrontational in their dealings with their children's schools, or they may choose to be as little involved with their children's schooling as possible. Too often, this is the negative history that children carry to school and that works against aspirations or expectations for college preparation and future college success. Clearly, it is with these parents that teachers, counselors, and administrators must be most concerned if they are to make a positive difference for their children. This is true at every age. But in particular, the effort of school people to work with parents of high school students can be a crucial part of ensuring that students who aspire to college will be well prepared to meet the challenges of becoming a college student — and a college graduate.

Understanding What Teachers Do

Part of helping parents to take a more active role in their children's education is helping them to understand what teachers do. Teachers are the most influential representatives of a school. And a teacher's influence extends beyond classroom instruction. But it is in the classroom that the teacher's influence begins.

High school students spend six to seven hours each day in classes with different teachers. Both individually and collectively, teachers affect how students feel about school, about education in general, and about them-

selves as learners. The best teachers create an environment in which students are encouraged and challenged to be all that they can be, to set high standards and high goals, and to strive to reach them.

Teachers who prejudge students cannot create this kind of encouraging environment. Thus it is important for teachers to communicate *unconditional* encouragement, believing (as is often true) that last year's "hard case" or last year's "loser" can be this year's "star." This message is as important for parents as for the students themselves.

But the best teachers are not uninformed about their students' histories. Teachers learn about their students' prior academic performance through reviewing students' academic records and through informal discussions with students' earlier teachers. Then they find ways to help students overcome past problems and establish new patterns for future academic success.

Parents need to join teachers in this endeavor. They need to be drawn into the schooling of their children as true partners. Both parents and teachers know important information about the young people in question, and they can work together to help students set realistic academic goals, to set high expectations, and to work to reach those goals and live up to those expectations.

Therefore, teachers need to create a "comfort zone" for parents by being available for informal discussions, such as quick phone calls or notes, as well as for conferences, open houses, and other, more formal meetings. Parents, for their part, must permit and encourage a working relationship with teachers that fosters com-

munication about their children's academic performance in the classroom.

Teachers who work to involve parents in the schooling of their children model good teaching. So, too, do parents model good parenting, learning, and teaching for their children by becoming actively involved in their children's learning.

Demonstrating that Learning Is Valued

Teachers also may be able to provide informal support for parents' involvement in their children's learning by discussing other activities that help parents demonstrate that learning is valued.

One way that parents can demonstrate that they are interested in their children's learning is by asking about school activities. The daily routines of modern families often work against this type of communication, but most parents can make time to inquire about what students are studying, what work needs to be done, and what new things have been learned. Shared mealtimes are a good opportunity for parents to informally monitor their children's learning. The particular meal is unimportant. If dinner time is inconvenient, it is just as effective to chat over breakfast. Some schools even invite parents to join their youngster for lunch, at least occasionally.

Parents and teachers alike can demonstrate their personal value for learning by working toward a college degree, by spending time on personal learning at home or in a library, and by talking to their children and students about things that they themselves are learning.

Public libraries usually offer a variety of reading groups in which adults can come together to read and discuss important fiction and nonfiction books. Also, parents or teachers and students can form their own reading groups to investigate various topics together and to engage in cross-age dialogues that are informative for both younger and older members of the groups. Likewise, some high school equivalency and college credit courses are open to both younger and older community members, which may offer opportunities for parents and their children to learn together.

Parents and teachers who demonstrate that learning is a strong value, a worthwhile pursuit that merits time and effort in their lives, offer a model that students can emulate. By adopting this value, students set a focus for greater success in attaining college admission and, eventually, earning a college degree.

Parent Support Groups

One way to connect teachers and parents — and to connect parents with one another — is through parent support groups.

Although they often are organized by school people, some parent support groups also function well when the school people step back from the spotlight and let the groups develop cohesion and focus that is largely parent-to-parent. Parents need opportunities to discuss questions and problems among themselves and to find areas where they can be mutually supportive.

Parents who are hopeful that their youngsters will be first-generation college graduates may need at least

initial guidance from school teachers, counselors, and administrators. A parent support group for this purpose can be very helpful. Often such parents need direct suggestions for how best to help their children to cultivate attitudes and learning habits that will lead to success in high school and beyond. Following are a few examples of such suggestions:

- Parents should take an active role in seeking out and attending (with their children) opportunities for academic advising, beginning no later than eighth grade.
- Before the start of grade nine, parents should collaborate with counselors and students to develop a four-year college preparatory class schedule.
- Parents should model that learning is a value by participating in school events and by taking on personal learning commitments, such as working on a GED program, taking college classes, and regularly reading for pleasure and learning.
- By reading and discussing books with their children, parents can model not only the value of learning but also good study habits.
- Parents can enhance and maintain open, honest communication with their children by listening to their children's comments and concerns about their school, their teachers and classmates, and their studies.

In a support-group setting, a parent or educator should take the role of facilitator. This person should lead participants to examine parent and teacher roles

and how parents and teachers can be mutually supporting. The facilitator should help the group participants to establish a roster of concerns or issues to be taken up over a series of group meetings. And the facilitator should assist the group in coming together, addressing the issue or concern, and coming to closure. Often, it also falls to the group facilitator to gather resources, summarize group discussions or decisions, and otherwise administer the group's work. This role can be shared by more than one individual at a time, or it can rotate among members of the group.

Parents in some districts, in which there is high concern for would-be first-generation African-American college students, have formed groups specifically dedicated to this concern. A communitywide Concerned Black Parents Council, for example, can be designed to provide educational resources for parents, to lobby local school boards for greater support for at-risk youth, and to organize parent support groups in local schools that will help parents better understand the academic requirements that their children will need to meet in order to reach the goal of attaining a college degree.

Student Peer Groups

All students adopt (and are adopted by) one or more peer groups. The shared values of these groups can shape students' attitudes toward themselves, their communities, and their future.

Peer groups are formal or informal associations of individuals who share an equal status. In an educational setting, such factors as the school's mission and tradition and the characteristics of teachers and students shape the expectations for students who are bound in the formal peer groups. Such formal peer groups include classes, groups within classes, and recognized school activities, such as athletic teams, clubs, musical groups, and so on.

Informal peer groups are the student groups that come together independently, often spontaneously: students who live in the same neighborhood, students who hang out in the same places, students who take the same bus to school, and so on.

Students attend and graduate from schools with a variety of race and class characteristics. These characteristics affect the types of peer groups that are formed by students. In some schools, for example, the racial and

ethnic mix is narrow; in others, it may be quite broad. For African-American students, urban schools often mean that they are a clear majority. This is not as likely to be the case in most suburban schools. Race affects students' peer groups, both in terms of group composition and in terms of the kinds and variety of peer groups that may be available.

For many African-American students, the major difference between suburban and urban schools is the size and range of the formal and informal peer groups to which they can belong. African-American students attending predominately white, suburban schools sometimes feel as though they will likely be rejected by certain peer groups and so have fewer choices. For example, some African-American students who are high academic achievers may be seen as a "threat" by white students, who reject the idea that black students can achieve high standards. But unfortunately, the opposite also is true. Some black students shy away from striving for good grades and high achievement because they perceive such successes as a "white thing." Thus these students adopt a peer value of school failure in order to belong.

Parents and teachers can influence how student peer groups develop and what values they adopt by structuring opportunities for positive groups to form. Following are a few suggestions that may assist in this process:

Recognize students' academic achievements. Parents, teachers, and administrators who find occasions to acknowledge and celebrate the academic achievements of students demonstrate a positive value for such achieve-

ments. Using certificates, tangible rewards, and public ceremonies that honor high achievement are ways to accomplish this goal. Schools also can form High Achievers Clubs, honor societies, and other extracurricular groups that encourage academic study and goal setting.

Establish a high achievers alumni program. Schools can expose current students to alumni who have demonstrated success in academic achievement by creating events that bring these positive role models back to the school to inspire and encourage students. Alumni Nights and classroom visits by successful graduates of all ages are excellent ways to accomplish this goal. Many students will feel drawn to adopt the attitudes and behaviors of these successful models.

Encourage community recognition programs. Educators and parents should encourage community businesses and other organizations to join in recognizing and celebrating student successes. Furthermore, such programs can grow into school-community partnerships that may lead to business involvement in academic programs, career days, student shadowing programs, internships, and other opportunities that can engender high aspirations and high expectations for students. Students who participate in such programs become members of new, productive peer groups.

Link with community support organizations. Schools also need to forge positive links with social service organizations, such as Boys' and Girls' Clubs, YMCA/YWCA, and others, to establish nonschool environ-

ments where students can find positive peer groups and an atmosphere that encourages and supports high achievement and the setting of goals for academic and social success. Churches also can be drawn into this support network.

Establish a "parents of strivers" discussion group. School teachers and administrators can use the discussion-group format to teach parents how to help their children set high standards and how to challenge their youngsters to succeed. Such discussion groups give educators an opportunity to teach parents who have not had a college experience about college life, so that those parents can be better prepared to encourage and inform their children who will be first-generation college attenders. Parallel student strivers groups can be another source of positive peer influence.

Create a "double-bind" coping skills program. Many African-American parents and students need to learn how to cope with the dual pressures of trying to overcome past educational limitations and succeeding as members of a minority group in a predominately white setting. This type of program is particularly helpful for would-be first-generation college attenders and can make a crucial difference for African-American students who plan to attend a predominately white college or university.

Developing and influencing peer groups to play a positive role requires school officials and parents to identify needs and then to work actively to meet them.

Parents' and peer groups' academic expectations play a role in shaping students' aspirations and performance standards and their completion of college.

Revitalizing the African-American Community

Racial and ethnic groups often view the sum of the group's achievement and social mobility in the achievements of individuals. The African-American community, in general, defines itself by the successes (and failures) of its members who have risen to prominence. Helping African-American youth to achieve the goal of college success is a powerful way to revitalize dispirited African-American communities. Thus encouraging and supporting students to attain the baccalaureate degree will have a multi-generational effect. This is particularly true for first-generation college achievers, because they are establishing a new legacy, a legacy of educational success and achievement.

Accomplishing the multi-generational effect requires that the African-American community embrace a new vision regarding students attending and graduating from college. This vision, or great expectation, must be activated as a model with functional components: in-

vested educators, proactive parents, support groups, peer groups, and committed students. Excellence does not just happen; it is created by individuals working together and embracing both individual and group expectations for academic achievement.

Moreover, this is a vision that needs fuel. One much-needed fuel is money. Therefore, educators, parents, and other members of the community (in particular of the African-American community) need to establish academic scholarships. Merit scholarships recognize students' commitment to excellence, and they are a means for students to attend college. They activate the expectation. And minority youth do need sustained financial assistance to attend college. This means scholarships, grants, work study, and other aid throughout the four or five years needed to attain a baccalaureate degree. For first-generation college students, this need can be crucial. But financial aid, while very important, is not the most important element in realizing the vision.

Earlier, I reviewed college special admission programs. These programs were designed to implement the vision of enabling more minority youth to attend college. Special admission programs have gained wide acceptance over the past several years and, indeed, more minority youth than in prior years now enroll in college because of such programs. However, special admission programs have not produced a significantly larger pool of African-American graduates at the bachelor's degree level than in previous generations. The reality is that such programs bring a higher enrollment of minority youth in predominately white institutions, but many

such youth later drop out of college either voluntarily or through academic dismissal. Special admission programs simply have not been able to redress the multitude of problems related to the basic unpreparedness for college work of many African-American and other minority students.

Clearly, for African-American students, as for students of all races, the real key to success is preparation during elementary, middle, and high school. For that preparation to be complete, schools alone cannot bear the main responsibility. They must enlist the aid of parents, who play the vital role; and they must form productive and lasting partnerships with the entire African-American community.

Conclusion

In summary, helping African-American students prepare for college is a complex, multidimensional challenge. It can be accomplished only through an equally complex, multidimensional set of projects, activities, and initiatives. Many of these, as I have tried to sketch in this fastback, can be set in motion by concerned educators. Teachers and administrators can reach out to uninvolved parents and involve them in the education of their children; teachers and administrators can reach out to unmotivated and underprepared students and find ways to motivate them to work to high standards and to aspire to a college education; and teachers and administrators can reach out to the African-American community and inspire them to a new vision of excellence for black youth.

Colleges and universities, too, must play a more active part in helping their African-American students persist and earn their bachelor's degrees. Special admission programs are a fledgling step, but clearly they are not the entire answer.

A crucial factor in whether students persist to graduation in colleges and universities is the educational and

social climate of the campus. When I talk to students, they often use weather analogies to describe their college environment. White and African-American students frequently differ in their views of a campus' climate. At many predominately white institutions, African-American students are likely to describe the campus atmosphere as "chilly" toward black students. This "chilliness" relates to whether students feel welcome, accepted, and included in the academic and social life of the institution. When students feel "chilly" or "cold," they are less likely to persist to graduation.

Many institutions of higher education have taken steps to make minority youth feel more welcome and more a part of campus life. Such steps include working to increase the numbers of minority faculty and minority students, developing diversity awareness programs, and aggressively addressing problems related to bigotry and violence against black students and other minority students.

Many black and white students *are* successful in college. And they often report similar academic experiences, regardless of whether they come from wealthy or impoverished backgrounds or enter through regular or special admission programs. Perhaps as one final task, we educators need to more thoroughly investigate these "success stories." We need to better understand and define what it takes for students to achieve success in college and then learn how to incorporate that knowledge in the work that we do with parents and students as we prepare African-American young people to enter the challenging world of academe.

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George H. Reavis (1883-1970) entered the education profession after graduating from Warrensburg Missouri State Teachers College in 1906 and the University of Missouri in 1911. He went on to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Columbia University. Dr. Reavis served as assistant superintendent of schools in Maryland and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1929 he was appointed director of instruction for the Ohio State Department of Education. But it was as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Cincinnati public schools (1939-48) that he rose to national prominence.

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